

A Curious Kelantan Charm.

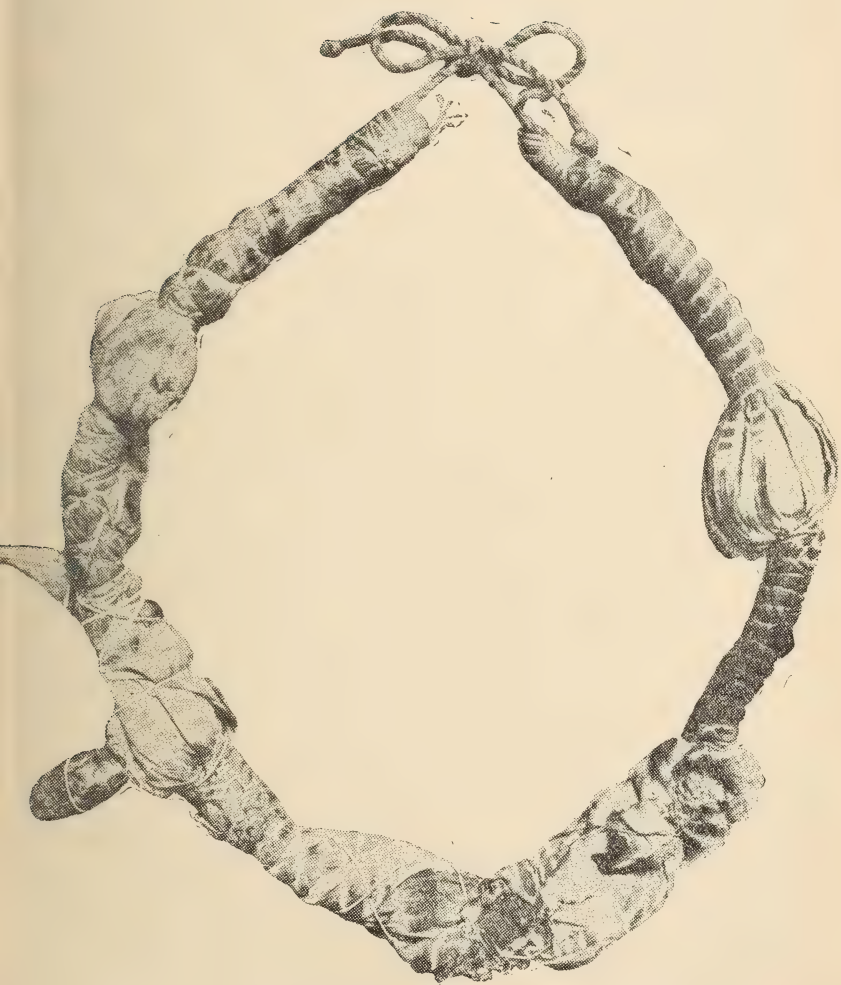
BY J. D. GIMLETTE.

Last year Chief Inspector Jackson gave me a rudely fashioned belt which had been found by the Kelantan Police on the body of a Malay robber, stabbed to death in 1917, in the district of Bacho'. It was tied round the dead man's waist concealed in the folds of his *sarong*. I am indebted to Captain H. A., Anderson, the Chief Police Officer of Kelantan, for access to the case file. The history is briefly as follows. Enche' Mah binti Enche' Mun heard a noise about 1.30 a.m., on 26.5.1917, as if a robber was breaking through the wall of her house (*orang buka buchu dinding*). She was frightened and roused her husband Awang Tanda bin Salleh. He seized a spear and stabbed a man who was about to enter their bed room. The robber ran a short distance and fell dead; he was a Kelantan Malay unknown to anyone in the seaside district of Bacho' or to anyone in the village of Pauh where the tragedy occurred. Awang Tanda had stabbed him between the ribs.

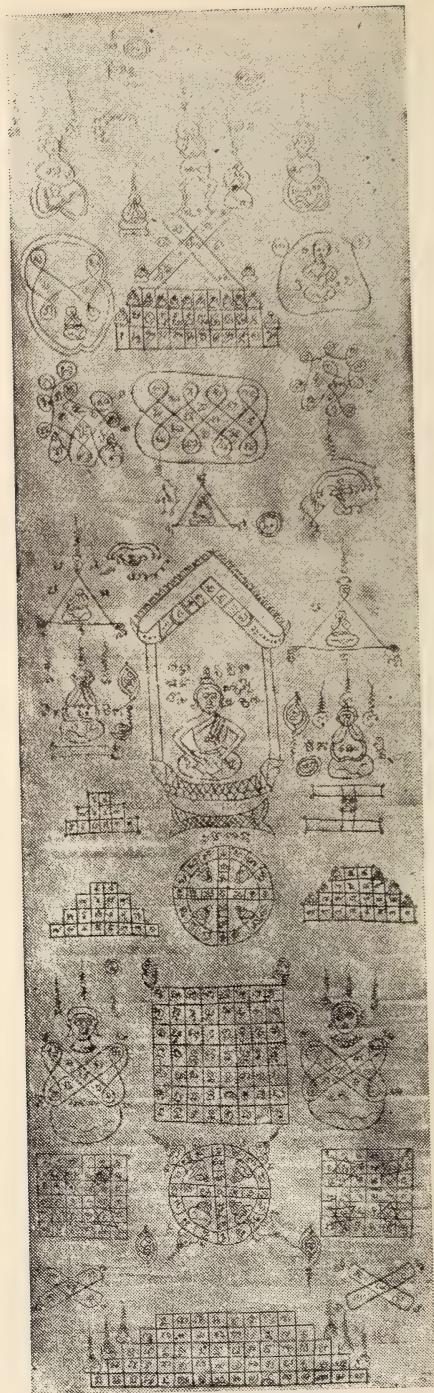
Photograph (A), recently taken in Kota Baharu, shows the general appearance of the robber's belt before it was taken to pieces. It was a girdle made of two stout cords about four feet long, twisted together and knitted in the centre, to make a small pouch which seems to have originally contained a white stone. The pouch had been cut open before the belt came into my possession and was empty; the cord on either side of it was strengthened by an extra strand of twisted cord, to the extent of about five inches on each side. This part of the girdle was worn behind and a strip of orange coloured calico, such as that worn by Siamese priests, dyed by means of a decoction of the heart of the Jack-tree (*Artocarpus integrifolia*, Linn., Urticaceae), was twisted round this central part of the belt making a kind of bundle.

Inside this yellow bundle were a wild boar's tusk; a smooth, round, slate-coloured stone, about as large as a small coin (*pitis*); a tuft of hair (*chẽmara babi*) said to have come from the neck of a wild boar, and one small oval-shaped, dark-speckled stone. The pig's tusk was originally wrapped in the cloth, not projecting as shown in the photograph: both it and the other talismans were made secure by means of twine bound round the cloth wherever necessary. An outer covering of dirty white calico about five feet in length and half a foot in breadth, strengthened at regular intervals by means of bindings of string, was wrapped round the whole belt except for a length of cord, free on either side, to tie in front.

A small fragment of bright metal, not heavy enough to be of value, and closely resembling on fracture a spur of copper pyrites, was found carefully wrapped in a scrap of plain white cloth, as



Photograph A.



Photograph B.

well as a rough, oval, grey-coloured stone, which was protected in the same way. Both of these were found in the folds of the long strip of white cloth, the inner surface of which was covered from top to bottom with Siamese drawings, letters, and numerals. A reproduction, taken from a tracing of the original design, is shown in photograph (B). Although the belt (*pakaian*) is described above as being rudely fashioned, both the inside yellow covering and the outside covering of white cloth were really very neatly twisted and strongly bound; the various talismans being secured by means of twine in the folds of the cloth, so implying that they must have been of value to the owner. Unfortunately two other stones or talismans had been cut out and stolen after the exhibit had been produced in Court and Awang Tanda acquitted.

At the time of the trial in 1917, the charm was described by the Kelantan Malay Police as an amulet connected with thieves, (*azimat lazim di-pakai oleh pēnchuri-pēnchuri*) and it is stated by them, to contain both *batu guliga* and *batu ular* as well as the tuft of hair from the pig. The mention of *batu ular* is of interest because *batu ular* is the stone that is supposed to be vomited by the snake and to possess luminous qualities. None of the stones that were found in the belt correspond however, in weight or size or colour with the usual conception of the bezoar stone, a calculus found sometimes inside small land animals, trees and more rarely in arachnida, (sic.); they seem, by common consent, to be merely polished pebbles from a river bed. None of them give a yellow reaction to the native test for *guliga* by rubbing with lime (*kapur*).

The Police Magistrate, Tēngku Hassan, (son-in-law to H. H. the Sultan of Kelantan), remarks in his notes that Kelantan yokels describe the charm as *buntat*, (petrified stones found in the bodies of animals supposed to contain, but not always, talismanic properties). One witness said that such a charm would protect the skin of the wearer from hurt or harm by any sort of weapon; that some think *chēmara babi* to be very useful to burglars because it keeps people in a sound sleep, (*sekot*); while others say that *chēmara babi* is invaluable because, if the wild pig should attempt to gore the wearer, it would not be able to wound him. The Magistrate ends his notes by remarking that many old men surmise that a charm of this nature will protect our skins; it will make people afraid of us and make us daring. Tēngku Hassan writes in conclusion that he himself has never seen any information about a charm of this kind in any of the original Malay books on charms and medicines for charms.

The chief interest of this curious belt seems to centre on the hair of the wild pig (*chēmara babi*). Superstitions about the wild boar (*Sus cristatus*), mentioned by Skeat in "Malay Magic," p. 188, are fully believed in by the Kelantan people; they do not seem however to recognize the fable of the "wild boar's chain", but pin their faith on a kind of hair necklace which they say the boar is very particular about keeping clean. A lucky man may find it

near a jungle pig's wallow, when the beast has taken it off for the purpose of bathing. It is not necessarily searched for by bad people and worn only by criminals. I have recently had an opportunity of examining two of the *chēmara babi* charms in Kota Baharu; they are identical in appearance and consist of small bundles of stiff, dark fibres, apparently obtained from a palm such as the palmyra or perhaps the coco-nut tree. About thirty fibres were tied together with cotton in one instance, forming a bundle about fifteen inches in length; this was enclosed in a small red bag made of cloth and valued at more than fifty dollars. It is essential that the *chēmara babi* be obtained from a live boar and kept alive. It is kept alive by first washing it with *bēūuru*, the stem of a very large, local *liane* used by Kelantan men and women for washing their hair, (*Entada scandens*, Linn., Leguminosae), and the juice of the lime fruit, (*Citrus acida*, Roxb., Rutaceae); then oiling with coco-nut oil and smoking for a few minutes with *kēmēnnyan* or benzoin, (*Styrax benzoin*). This is to be done every Thursday evening about the time of the hour of prayer; it should have the effect of making the *chēmara* elastic and curly.

The tuft of hair hidden in the robber's belt and described by the police at the time as *chēmara babi* is of quite a different character to the fibres described above. Even on casual inspection it appears from its black colour with reddish tinge, its fineness and lustre to be human hair. On dissection it was found to be a ball of hair, about two inches in diameter, very tightly rolled and sewn round a small circle of cord by means of twine passed through a piece of scalp. Further examination shows that the microscopical structure is identical with that of human hair with a similar breadth of 75 microns; this measurement is three and four times smaller than the breadth of the coarse vegetable fibres of the two true *chēmara babi* which are 300 and 225 microns respectively. Various suggestions have been offered by Kelantan Malays as to the source of this tuft of hair. It is said that it may have come from the corpse of the first born child of first born parents, dug up by night from the grave; that it is *rambut di-jalin hantu*, or hair that has been tangled by ghosts on the head of a dying woman, or perhaps a trophy from some woman who had been scalped.

Chow Kiew, the high priest of the Siamese community in Kelantan (To' Cha), has given me some information about the Siamese letters and drawings. With good humoured contempt he said the design was not a reliable amulet such as an old man like he himself could have made, but a spurious charm made by a Siamese "witch doctor" for a few dollars. He explained that the central figure of Buddha is surrounded by an ornamental frame, and that the numerals and letters are taken from the sacred books of Siam apparently at haphazard. All the other figures are supposed to represent a child in various stages of uterine development as well as at birth. He drew particular attention to the wild boar's tusk which he declared to be solid throughout and that another like it could not be found among a thousand pigs.